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AUTHOR Baty, Jody; Sorensen, June; Pancini, Mark; Pasier, Emilia H.
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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to increase the use of appropriate social skills by middle school students through an increased instructional emphasis on social skills. The specific social skills addressed were listening, encouraging, self-control, appropriate manners, and accepting others' ideas. These skills were introduced using M-charts and were explored in 2-week blocks using cooperative grouping, role play, direct instruction, journaling, discussion, and modeling. Post-intervention surveys and checklists indicated an increase in student use of targeted social skills. (Six appendices contain surveys, checklists, and lesson materials. Contains 19 references.) (EV)

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USING SOCIAL SKILLS INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL GROWTH

Jody Baty
June Sorensen
Mark Pancini
Emilia H. Pasier

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

Dr. Susan Marcus
Advisor

Robert Bristow
Advisor

Beverly Hadley
Dean, School of Education

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving the social skills of middle school students. The targeted population consisted of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students in a new middle school. The school is located in a northwest suburb of a large Midwestern city. The problem of poor social skills was documented with teacher observations, behavioral checklists and with parent and student surveys.

Analysis of probable cause indicated that there are poor social skills among young adolescents. These inadequate skills interfered with the students' academic and social growth. Review of the research indicated that social skills were not taught nor stressed either at home or at school. Research also indicated that a lack of modeling and a concentration on controlling negative behavior in the schools have contributed to students' deficiencies in this area.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by other researchers, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the development of social skills training and instruction. The program included cooperative learning activities, direct instruction of social skills, and various related activities.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of social skills, an improvement in the targeted behaviors and an increase in the understanding and use of appropriate manners.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted middle school exhibit inadequate social skills that interfere with academic and social growth. Evidence for the existence of this problem include teacher observation, checklists, results of student and parent surveys as well as teacher journal entries that describe student behaviors.

The targeted site is a middle school in a northwest suburban metropolitan area. The site consists of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. Total student population of the school is 675. The ethnic mix of the population consists of 94.7% White, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander and 2.2% Hispanic. The percentage of students with limited English proficiency is 0.1%. Low-income families represent 1.2% of the total population. Attendance at this site is 96.4% and the mobility rate is 3.0%. There are no reported chronic truants at this school.

The total number of staff is 87, consisting of 63 teachers, 13 teacher assistants, nine support staff, and two administrators. The average number of years of teaching experience is 12.6. Teachers with a Masters Degree and above, is 53.9%. The average teacher salary is $48,720. Pupil to certified staff ratio is 12.2:1. Average class size is 26.3 students.

The targeted school opened in August 1998. It is a new building, built after a citywide referendum passed on the first attempt. Prior to this year, the community had one middle school, which housed all of the seventh and eighth grade students in the district. This middle school and all five of the elementary schools in the district were overcrowded. Building the new middle school, as well as moving to a sixth through eighth grade program, has alleviated the overcrowding in each building.

This targeted school includes teachers working in cooperative teams or cores. Each core teacher is provided five laptop computers, each with internet access. Many electives are offered to the students, including technology, industrial arts, music and home arts. There are after school clubs, intramural programs, and homework help offered in addition to inter-scholastic sports. The middle school also offers a Student Government Association as another means of getting students involved.

Community Setting

The surrounding community has a population of approximately 36,000. Median home value is $228,112. Median age of residents is 43.3 years. The median education of residents is 14.3 years of school completed. Average family income is $74,232. Approximately sixty percent of the community members are married. In the community, 42.1% of the adults hold managerial or professional occupations. There are 19 places of worship, four health facilities, and three child care facilities.

Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) are a strong force in the district's schools. They provide funds for school activities, as well as supervisory support at dances, dinners and student performances. There is also an Educational Learning Foundation (ELF) which is sponsoring an Ethical Leadership Conference focusing on teaching listening and communication skills to middle school students. This foundation provides scholarships and support for teachers, as well.

National Context of the Problem

Social skills deficits in adolescents are concerns worth addressing. Much of the literature available on this topic concentrates on targeted groups of students with disabilities, both learning and behavioral. According to Brenda L. Townsed(1994).

> Children achieving normally have also been omitted from traditional social skill programs. Educators may have falsely assumed that students were capable of performing certain social skills, when they might not have been taught to do so. Thus, social skill interventions have begun to target children who do not have identified disabilities but can clearly benefit from deliberate social skill instruction.

Professor Larry Nucci of the University of Illinois at Chicago (personal communication, April 5, 2000) states that,

> A key element in a person's ability to interact in an ethical way, and to positively impact one's own ethical development is listening and communication skills. Research on moral development indicates that moral growth is related to a persons ability to engage in this type of communicative interaction.

Despite all of the writings stressing the importance of listening and communication, these are not skills commonly taught in the classroom. It is often assumed that children will pick up these skills simply by example. Current research indicates the need for more direct instruction in the social skills area. In response to the need for social skills, students need positive interactions as well as strong support by adults and peers. Johnson and Johnson (1988) discuss the need for social support.

> Students need emotional support and encouragement to cope with the risks inherent in attempting to learn new concepts and skills and challenging themselves intellectually. Student achievement, successful problem solving, persistence on challenging tasks under frustrating conditions, lack of cognitive interference during problem solving, liking for school, school attendance, academic and career aspirations, and frequency of seeking appropriate assistance are all related to the social support present in the classroom.

Because of the vast need for appropriate social skills in scholastic, social and career pursuits, it is essential to focus on these skills in the middle school setting. This action research project will address these issues and results of the attempt to teach social skills.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of inadequate social skills, parents were surveyed, students were surveyed, and teachers utilized behavioral checklists.

Seventy-two students were included in the research at the targeted site. This involved four separate classes, spanning 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Four separate middle school teachers of math, reading, language arts and physical education implemented the research tools. A three part survey, including a rating scale on parental perceptions of social skills, was sent home the first week of school. A summary of the parents' surveys, detailing their understanding of their adolescents' social skills is presented in figure one. The five social skills addressed were listening, encouragement, accepting ideas, practicing manners and self-control. A ranking of five demonstrated strength in the skill, while a one indicated an area of weakness.

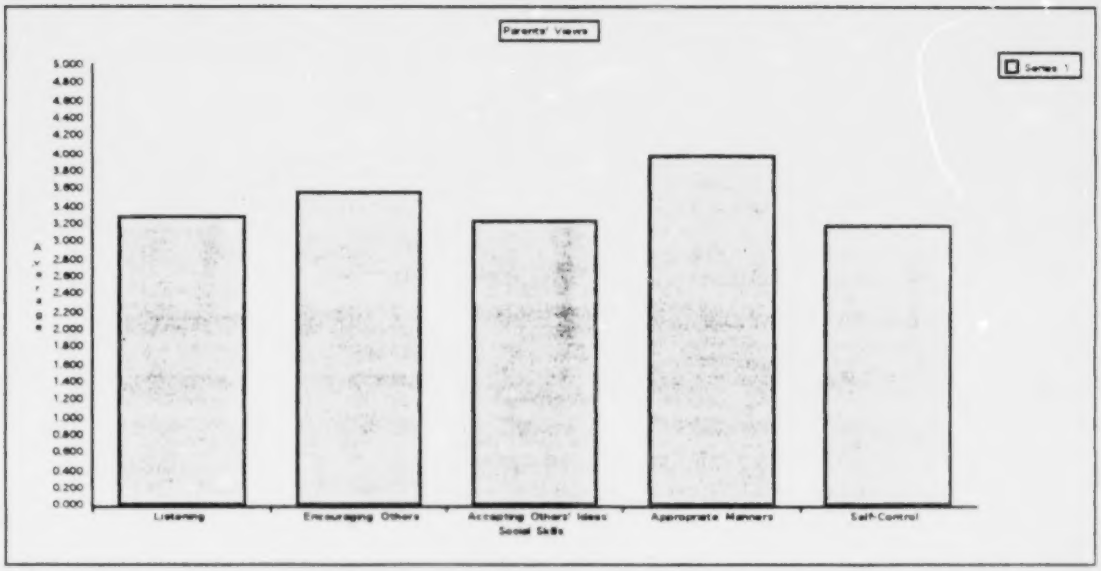

Figure 1. Social skills ranking of students as per parent surveys for the targeted classes during the fall of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 1 represents parental insight into the social behavior of their own children. The results were garnered from surveys returned by parents. The parents' data shows that these students are well mannered, but lack self-control.

The second tool used was a student survey. Per the targeted students' own reporting, the use of appropriate manners was ranked highest, meaning that they saw this as their strongest social skill. As a group, the targeted students felt that encouragement among their peers was lacking. On the topic of exhibiting self-control, the targeted students stated that their actions were adequate.

The behavioral checklists administered by the researchers daily for one week, for an average of forty minutes per day, showed more negative interactions than positive interactions. The encouragement of others was seldom exhibited throughout the week, while criticism of others occurred daily.

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Probable Causes

Probable Causes from the Literature

The literature suggests a number of underlying causes for the decline in appropriate social skills in young adolescents. One of these causes is the lack of instruction directly related to social skill training. According to Howell (1985 in Maag, 1994), "Teachers have been conditioned to view academic and social behavior quite differently." The emphasis in teacher education and staff development is in academic instruction, and perhaps, discipline training. Howell and Morehead state that both academic and social behavior are governed by similar principles of learning and responding to similar interventions. "Although this line of reasoning may be philosophically appealing, it is a hard concept for teachers to accept. This distinction, regardless of how capricious it may be, is partially responsible for the prevailing view that teachers' primary responsibility is to produce academic behavior and control social behavior." (Howell & Morehead, in Maag, 1994). The focus, in many cases is controlling negative behavior. Neel (1988 in Maag 1994) reports that the "control mentality is pervasive throughout education. Consequently, schools have developed elaborate management plans to decrease inappropriate social behavior."

Old methods of instruction miss the mark in increasing the social skill proficiency of our young people. Johnson and Johnson (1988) state that "teachers have been taught and encouraged to prevent students from helping each other, talking to each other, or encouraging each other. Rather, teachers have been taught to ensure that students work alone." Maag (1994) adds to this, "Teaching youngsters social skills will be a frustrating endeavor until misbehavior is viewed as an opportunity for increasing interpersonal functioning rather than something to be punished." This lack of cooperative learning and cooperation in general among

students is a cause of the students inability to relate to others appropriately. Because they are not taught positive social skills, students become adversaries rather than partners in the education process. As educators, we have not set the tone nor made possible the settings for learning these appropriate social skills.

> "In the past twenty years schools have become much larger, with corresponding increases in bureaucratization, resulting in impersonal formality. Individual accountability on a personal level has been decreasing within schools. Current estimates are that over 85% of instruction within schools involves lectures, individualized seat work, or competition where students are isolated from one another, forbidden to interact, and pitted against each other"(Johnson & Johnson, 1983).

Another major cause for the lack of social skills in young adolescents, is the change in family dynamics and the failure of families to take the responsibility for teaching social skills to young people. Rutter, Sherman and Farina state, "At a less extreme level, there is evidence to suggest that children from a socially deprived home environment may develop unacceptable social behaviors" (in Hargie, 1981). "While children from a culturally richer home environment tend to develop more appropriate social behaviors" (Shaefer and Baylelly, 1963 in Hargie, 1981).

The change in family dynamic was explored by Johnson and Johnson (1983) in their research. "The American Humane Association has stated that families have become highly individualistic and as a result children do not receive enough adult interaction, and the face-to-face discussion of feelings, and philosophy of life between parents and children is missed completely."

Probable Causes from the Targeted Site

The researchers have observed the change in family dynamics to be a major cause of poor social skills in the targeted students. As stated in chapter one, this site is

located in an affluent area. Students, as a rule, are over scheduled with the many extra curricular activities offered to them in this culture. Some of these activities are religious training, athletics, music, and dance lessons. This results in a decrease of time spent at home as a family. Students report extremely busy schedules, much time spent alone, and little time set aside for what were once traditional family activities and family interactions. The researchers also observe a lack of formal training at home from the parents or guardians in the social skill area. Many students are unaware of how to recognize the feelings and emotions of themselves and those around them because this is not modeled at home. The targeted students also lack basic manners in social situations such as kindness and appropriate conversation skills.

In observation and research of the targeted middle school students, one major reinforcement of poor social skills appears to be unhealthy peer relationships. This is commenced and augmented by negative peer modeling. Students who are perceived as popular or "cool" are imitated by others who care to be like them. Often, these imitated behaviors are inappropriate. Peers relationships are critical at this life stage, and impact adolescent behavior, attitude and interactions with others.

The researchers have observed that many peer relationships at this site are based on stereotypes. Students of like economic and ethnic backgrounds tend to group together, while students who are " different" are often excluded. Researchers have also noted that meanness is an acceptable behavior between peers at this site. This is observed in interactions both in and out of classrooms, lunchrooms, unstructured settings, and student written notes found by staff. Students at the targeted site, in structured classroom settings, do not appear to have the ability to work together in a cooperative group as a means to accomplishing a task. Often, they are much more successful at individual seat work than in any kind of work which involves a team or a group effort.

In summation, there are several probable causes suggested from the literature and from the site. One of these causes is a lack of instruction directly related to social skill training. Another cause stated in the literature is that students have traditionally been taught, and rewarded for, working alone. This has left the students deficient in the area of relating to others appropriately. A shift in family dynamics is both cited in the literature and observed at the targeted middle school as a cause of poor social skills in adolescents. Splintered family time, and less direct teaching and modeling at home has resulted in students unaware of basic manners and sensitivity to others. Finally, poor peer relations are observed on site. The targeted students have often been observed to be mean and isolating of their peers. While the causes are complex, there are solutions to the problem of poor social skills in middle school students.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Social skills are defined as "the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial, or beneficial primarily to others." (Combs and Slaby, 1977 in Hargie, 1981). In How to Access Authentic Learning, Kay Burke defines interpersonal skills as those which give students the ability to understand other people and to work effectively with them.

The culture in our schools today is filled with a deep concern promoting reevaluation of the school's role in the teaching of social skills. Increased violence among teens, adolescent suicide and depression, and a high rate of student dissatisfaction are only a few of the alarming trends present in today's schools. Educators are beginning to consider many options which incorporate a social skills program into their curriculum. The importance of social skills in schools, as well as in everyday relationships, is vitally important to one's well being.

Knowing how to interact with and get along with peers, co-workers, family members and teachers does not come without training. Educators can not only state the social skills that need to be addressed, they need to make sure that the students

have grasped the understanding and the importance of the skill. This will require class time, usually reserved for other endeavors, to reinforce the skills. Rottier believes that time spent reassuring social skills will go a long way in the students understanding the importance of learning and using these skills. Much research has documented the fact that the teaching and reinforcing of social skills improves the academic and overall well being of middle school adolescents.

A person's ability to interact with the people and the world around them in a socially acceptable manner is crucial to long-term success. According to Hargie (1981), this interaction with others at an interpersonal level is called social skills. Included in the definition of social skills are plethora verbal and non-verbal behaviors vital to developing appropriate relationships (Rinn and Markle as cited in Hargie, 1981). The true measure of being socially skilled is not found in an academic assessment, but in the success, or lack thereof, of interpersonal relationships. According to Phillips (as cited in Hargie, 1981):

> A person is socially skilled according to the extent to which he or she can communicate with others, in a manner that fulfills ones rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations to a reasonable degree without damaging the other person's similar rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations, and hopefully share these rights, etc. with others in a free and open exchange (p. 12).

Further defining the concept of social skills is the aspect of there being a mutual benefit to all parties involved in appropriate social interactions.

In academic settings, the need for suitable social skills is heightened. "There is evidence that difficulty with the peer group early in life may be a risk factor for a range of personal problems at a later stage in the life cycle" (Bulkeley and Cramer, 1994). Being able to understand, empathize and take on the emotional perspective of others, increases ones ability to cooperate socially and academically. With the ever-

increasing diversity in our neighborhoods and schools, this ability to communicate effectively with those with whom we interact is crucial. The adolescent years are fraught with insecurity, self consciousness and immaturity. The inability to understand those around them sets young people apart from their peers and can cause frustration and isolation. This frustration can lead to behavioral problems. Many of the behavioral issues taking up the time, energy and focus of our teachers and administrators stem from the unresolved frustration of the "problem" students. Warger and Rutherford explored this perspective (1996):

> Without basic social skills, such as listening, following directions, asking relevant questions, sharing materials, waiting one's turn, using manners, and seeking help appropriately, to name but a few, students will miss out on essential academics and be denied positive learning experiences with their peers. In some cases, they might even be punished or excluded for not demonstrating skills that they have not been taught which can often set the vicious cycle of behavioral problems and disruption in motion (p.21).

A student, then, may be disciplined or censured for lacking skills they never had an opportunity to learn. A teacher's willingness to focus on teaching these skills in the classroom will pay dividends in more positive behaviors and a decrease in behavioral concerns. Herer (1994) stressed that communication is the key factor in education, and a child's mastery of communication skills is an indicator of future success in school. It is crucial to set apart time and experiences for these social skills to be learned. Time spent on this focus is not wasted, but will result in improved behavior and satisfaction of the students.

Social Skills and Cooperative Learning

In order for students to acquire necessary social skills, it is imperative for those skills to be taught and reinforced. Learning any skill is best done within a setting that

seems natural to the learners. The most natural setting for the instruction of social skills is within a cooperative learning situation. According to Johnson and Johnson (1988):

> Children are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Students must be taught these skills and be motivated to use them... One of the great advantages of cooperative learning is that important "life survival" skills are required, used, reinforced and mastered within a task situation. (p.5:2)

These settings are not easy to attain in a standard academic setting, hence the need for more cooperative groupings within a classroom. Johnson and Johnson, in their Cooperation in the Classroom, define cooperative learning as positive interdependence. They claim that accountability is the key, both for the learning and for helping others to learn. Johnson and Johnson (1988) stress the need for face-to-face interactions and students using interpersonal and social skills to get to a common goal. Finally, it is essential to review their work together. These steps, under the tutorage of a skilled and confident teacher, can yield very positive results.

> "It is within cooperative situations, where there is a task to complete, that social skills become most relevant and should ideally be taught. All students need to become skillful in communicating, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, engaging in fruitful controversy, and managing conflicts." (p. 5:3)

Bulkeley (1994) reviews the enhancement of social skills learning when approached in a group setting, using peer modeling as the norm. Social skill development is enhanced by working in a realistic setting because the learning fits the actions. An added benefit is that academic success increases when the extra time and effort is made to utilize these non-academic training methods. In fact, as social skills

are one of the seven basic components of cooperative learning, teaching the students these skills will serve to enhance all learning in the classroom.

The Importance of Teaching Social Skills

Many middle school and high school educators have resigned themselves to accepting the level of sociability that their students exhibit, sure that the window of opportunity for honing these skills is long past. On the contrary, however, Bellanca (1992) contends that , "Although it may be more difficult to introduce students already formed with negative social skills to the values of cooperation, trust, and respect, it is never too late. In fact, it is probably all the more important...even in the twelfth grade if that is what the students most need." In agreement with this argument is Inderbitzen-Pisaruk, who focuses on neglected teens. Even these young people, he claims, require a greater emphasis on the skills of cooperation, sharing and helping in order to reduce their negative behaviors (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk in Bulkeley, 1994). The idea that it is never too late to enhance the students social skill competency is impetus for middle and upper level educators to address these needs among their students. Students seen as capable of growth will feel more hopeful about taking the risks necessary to grow. Cooper (1980 in Johnson 1983) points out that cooperative learning experiences result in the feeling of being liked, supported and accepted.

It is not a matter of merely placing students into a group, but giving them the opportunity to work cooperatively with others. It is up to the teacher to structure the learning environment. Accountability, then, becomes key in the learning of social skills. In cooperative learning situations, the student knows he or she is responsible for helping their peers to know and understand the learning (McCabe 1992). Johnson and Johnson (1992) point out that working cooperatively with peers results in greater emotional health and self-esteem than does competition with peers or independent learning. Traditional classroom contests and rankings do not, then, enhance the

feeling of success or safety in school. Knowing that one can work with others in order to achieve a goal promotes higher levels of self-esteem and healthier processing abilities (Gunderson 1980 in Johnson 1983)

In his book, Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman continually discussed the importance of the level of self-awareness in the success in life of people. He talked about how the emotional quotient is a much more reliable predictor of success than the long favored intelligence quotient (IQ). When people are able to practice self control, be aware of others feelings as well as their own, posses the ability to read social cues and respond appropriately and practice the social arts they are much more productive and successful in attaining contentment in their lives. In Part Five, "Emotional Literacy", Goleman cited many examples of groups of people who display poor emotional intelligence skills, and how the deficits have affected their lives in negative ways. He then cited studies of interventions done for groups affected by these emotional deficits and how teaching coping and observational social skills enabled these groups to have much healthier, productive lives. When people, for whatever reasons, have not acquired skills that are required to be accepted as part of society, their intellectual growth and learning is impaired. Interventions make a difference in their lives. Social and emotional skills are learned behaviors and can be taught, even after the ideal window of time is passed. "But timely help can change these attitudes and stop a child's trajectory toward delinquency; several experimental programs have had some success in helping such aggressive kids learn to control their antisocial bent before it leads to more serious trouble" (Goleman, p. 238).

In a study designed by Duke University psychologist John Lochman, a group of "anger-ridden grade-school trouble makers" was trained in forty minute sessions, twice weekly, for six to twelve weeks in how to view social cues. The students were shown encounters of children and taught to recognize which reactions were friendly or

neutral, rather than hostile. In the beginning of the study, all cues were viewed as hostile by these students. They were also instructed in appropriate techniques for avoiding angry, aggressive responses in a variety of situations. Three years after after they were taught these distinctions, that had not been obvious to them prior to intervention, these "trouble makers" exhibited less classroom disruption, more positive feelings about themselves and a greater ability to make appropriate decisions about the use of drugs and alcohol than others who had not received the interventions (Goleman, p. 238).

Depression is another example of emotional illiteracy. When students are depressed they are less able to pay attention in class or remember what they have been taught because "depression interferes with their memory and concentration..." (Goleman, p. 243). Also depression sufferers are less able to identify their feelings accurately.

> "When depressed children have been compared to those without depression, they have been found to be more socially inept, to have fewer friends, to be less preferred than others as playmates, to be less liked and to have more troubled relationships with other children. The good news: there is every sign that teaching children more productive ways of looking at their difficulties lowers their risk of depression." (p245)

It is important to teach students that certain results, such as getting a poor report card, or not fitting in socially, are not the result of personal flaws, but the lack of training in how to make a change for the better. When children in an Oregon high school with symptoms of low-level depression were educated how to challenge thinking patterns associated with depression, they learned to get along better with peers and parents. They also were better able to participate in social activities they found pleasant.

Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, indicates that the need to feel safe and have

a sense of belonging must be met before anyone can be able to achieve and learn. this is especially true for adolescents. It is important to teach students skills which will enable them to feel as if they belong in order to help them learn.

Since dropping out of school is a particular risk for socially rejected children, it is important to teach them how to become more socially adept. Social isolation can lead to depression which interferes with learning. Social isolation, which can result in depression, can stem from two main factors.

> Two kinds of emotional proclivities lead children to end up as social outcasts. As we have seen, one is the propensity to angry outbursts and to perceive hostility even where none is intended. The second is being timid, anxious, and socially shy. But over and above these temperamental factors, it is children who are "off" - whose awkwardness repeatedly makes people uncomfortable - who tend to be shunted aside. One way these children are off is in the emotional signals they send. When grade schoolers with few friends were asked to match an emotion such as disgust or anger with faces that displayed a range of emotions, they made far more mismatches than did children who were popular. When kindergartners (sic) were asked to explain ways they might make friends with someone or keep from having a fight, it was the unpopular children - the ones others shied away from playing with - who came up with self-defeating answers ("Punch him" for what to do when both children wanted the same toy, for example), or vague appeals for help from a grown-up. And when teenagers were asked to role-play being sad, angry, or mischievous, the more unpopular among them gave the least convincing performances. It is perhaps no surprise that such children come to feel that they are helpless to do any better at making friends; their

social incompetence becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy (p250).

Fortunately, children can be coached in how to make friends according to Steven Asher, a University of Illinois psychologist (p251). Programs like his have been found to raise the popularity of students by as much as 60 percent.

In example after example, studies presented by Goleman indicate the importance and success of teaching skills to students who lack them. Many things interfere with the learning of students, and if some of these obstacles can be overcome, students can become more productive in school and life. Teaching social skills, in addition to standard curriculum, can lead to a higher level of student growth and success in school. If their hierarchical needs of safety and belonging are met because they have been taught skills that will help them be more socially acceptable, students will be better able to focus on learning.

How to Teach the Social Skills

The teacher must know the specific skill they are targeting with his or her students. Researchers pinpoint the need for teaching cooperation, sharing, communication, problem solving, responsibility and other social skills specific to the needs of the individuals and the milieu. It is often assumed that the family will address these issues at home, but as McCabe (1992) points out, the average amount of one-on-one contact between parent and child is approximately fifteen minutes a day. This leaves the great majority of contact time with the child to the teachers in his or her life. Capitalizing on this time hinges on the willingness of the teacher to reach beyond traditional methods of instruction. Rottier (1991) details the best use of these opportunities to reach the students:

> Be sure students understand the skill and its importance. Teachers cannot assume that merely pointing out social skills to students will ensure an

understanding of the skills. They must be specifically defined, discussed in some detail, and modeled for students. Many middle-level students are not aware that certain social skills are important in their lives, much less do they realize their importance in a learning situation. Spending time showing students why these skills are important will go a long way toward setting the stage for learning them.

Formulas and theories about teaching social skills abound. Two of the most well respected, however, are the theory described by Bellanca and Fogarty and the cooperative learning skills spelled out by Johnson and Johnson. When teaching social skills it is important to make sure that the students understand the need and the value of these skills, know the behavior indicators of the skills, when to use the skill, and practice these skills until they are automatic.

Bellanca and Fogarty state that there are five steps in teaching social skills. The first is *hook*. This stage is the base of the teaching, as here the students are given the encouragement and the impetus to develop social skills. Not only must they see the need to hone their skills, but they must see a pay-off for learning them. Young people in general, and young adolescents in particular, will not seek to learn for the intrinsic value of learning. Because of their developmental stage, they must see a practical reason for doing so.

The next step is to *teach* . Here, a teacher might choose to use a graphic organizer to enable students to generate ideas about the specific social behavior looked for by the teacher. Once each student or group completes a graphic organizer, such as a T-chart, the teacher can compile the student work into a chart for the classroom, and perhaps a copy for each student to have of his or her own. The idea is to reinforce the definition of the skill and what this skill will "look like" when it is being correctly practiced.

The third step in Bellanca and Fogarty's plan is *practice*. A teacher needs to guide any skill that needs to be taught. If listening, for example, is the skill being addressed, the students must be provided with three to five minutes a day when they focus only on listening. Once this happens, the students will begin to concentrate on the skill and will gain an understanding of how to carry out the skill. After this intensive attention to the skill, the teacher can begin to incorporate the skill into everyday activities and the students will begin to exhibit stronger skills.

In the fourth step, Bellanca and Fogarty turn their attention to the teacher. This step is to *observe*. Teachers need to recognize and encourage students when they accomplish something that has been taught. Teachers need to keep track of who is succeeding in using the skills and how often the skills are being used in the classroom. The most efficient way to keep track of the use of these skills would be an observation checklist. This tool needs to be kept simple, clear and measurable.

Finally, a *reward* for learning and using a skill needs to occur. Groups and students need to know that some type of reward will be built in for appropriately using the skill. Rewards should be used to free up a student's time, such as free reading time, or another type of prize which encourages the child to reach for this goal. Johnson and Johnson use the term cooperative skills instead of social skills and say cooperative skills are the keystones to maintaining a stable family, a successful career, and a stable group of friends (David W. Johnson, 1988, pg 5.2).

There are four basic assumptions underlying teaching students cooperative skills. The first is that prior to teaching the skills, a cooperative context must be established. Second, cooperative skills have to be directly taught. Third, while it is the teacher who structures cooperation within the classroom and initially defines the skills required to collaborate, it is the other group members who largely determine whether the skills are learned and internalized. Fourth, the earlier students are taught

cooperative skills, the better.

Johnson contends there are four levels of cooperative skills. Forming is the set of bottom-line skills needed to establish a functioning cooperative learning group. Functioning skills are those needed to manage the group's activities in completing the task and in maintaining effective working relationships among members. Formulating skills are those needed to build deeper-level understanding of the material being studied, to stimulate the use of higher quality reasoning strategies, and to maximize mastery and retention of the assigned material. Fermenting is the set of skills needed to stimulate reconceptualization of the material being studied, cognitive conflict, the search for more information, and the communication of the rationale behind one's conclusions.

There are five major steps in teaching cooperative skills. The first step is ensuring students see the need for the skill. Second is ensuring that students understand what the skill is and when it should be used. Setting up practice situations and encouraging mastery of the skill is the third step. The fourth step is ensuring that students have the time and the procedures needed for processing (and receiving feedback on) how well they are using the skill. Ensuring that students persevere in practicing the skill until the skill seems a natural action is the final step.

Nothing we learn is more important than the skills required to work cooperatively with other people. Most human interaction is cooperative. Without some skill in cooperating effectively, it is difficult (if not impossible) to maintain a marriage, hold a job, or be part of a community, society, and world.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on social skills processes, during the period of September 1999 to November 1999, the middle school students

from the targeted classes will increase their ability to use social skills as measured by teacher-constructed parent surveys, student surveys and teacher observations.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Materials that foster social skills in middle school will be developed.
2. Materials that foster social skills will be acquired from outside sources.
3. A series of learning activities that address social skills will be implemented for sixth, seventh and eighth graders.

Action Plan

At the beginning of the first trimester, each parent of the participating students will be mailed a parent permission form (Appendix A) and a parent survey (Appendix B). The survey focuses on parents' observations of their children's strengths and weaknesses in regards to the targeted social skills. Also each student participating in the research will individually complete a student survey covering the same social skills as were addressed in the parent survey (Appendix C).

At both the onset and the conclusion of the action research, researchers will be using a behavior checklist (Appendix D) to tally positive and negative social skill behaviors observed in the classroom.

Social skills will be addressed in the classroom in two week blocks. Each skill will be looked at through six different types of activities. The specific social skills to be addressed will be: listening, encouraging, self-control, appropriate manners, and accepting others' ideas. Each social skill will be introduced through the use of an M-chart (Appendix E) to display and reinforce how each social skill sounds, looks and feels.

Biweekly themes will be implemented into the curriculum using cooperative

grouping, role play, direct instruction, journaling, discussion and modeling. Representative lesson plans and activities integrate each social skill theme (Appendix F). Flexible cooperative learning groups will be engaged in a number of social skills activities. The researchers will involve the targeted students in role playing/simulation learning activities. Researchers' direct instruction and modeling will contribute to students' awareness of appropriate social skills. Discussions will give the children the opportunity to hear others' opinions and views on specific social behaviors, and to formulate their own opinions as well.

Daily Action Plan

Week 1 Team Building - 8/30/99

Day 1
- Introduce surveys
- Hand out student surveys - 15 min
- Hand Jive game

Day 2
- T-shirt activity(make and share only)

Day 3
- Personal communicator inventory

Week 2 Listening - 9/6/99 (No school Monday)

Day 1
- Good listening - Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Day 2
- Back to back

Day 3
- Active Listening - 5 page activity

Week 3 Listening - 9/13/99

Day 1
- Gossip game

Day 2
- Triadic interview

Day 3
- Journal - Poor communication

Week 4 Encouraging - 9/20/99

Day 1
- Encouraging - Looks like, sounds like feels like

Day 2
- Self-appraisal/Appraisal of others

Day 3
- Putting encouraging into practice

Week 5 Encouraging - 9/27/99

Day 1
- Web-times I felt encouraged

Day 2
- Strength bombardment

Day 3
- Return to t-shirts-have students write positives on each others' shirts

Week 6 Self control (think before you act) - 10/4/99

Day 1
- Self Control - Looks like, Sounds like, Feels like

Day 2
- Self Control 1

Day 3
- Self Control 2

Week 7 Self control (think before you act) - 10/11/99 (No school Monday)

Day 1
- Here Comes the Judge

Day 2
- Student Log-Times I lost self control and kept self control

Day 3
- Journal - Why is it important to take responsibility for your actions?

Week 8 Appropriate manners - 10/18/99

Day 1
- Appropriate Manners - Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Day 2
- Manners Ball Toss

Day 3
- Brainstorm family/culture courtesy rules

Week 9 Appropriate Manners - 10/25/99

Day 1
- Introduce and assign watching a TV show to observe courtesies

Day 2
- Work in groups to come up with list from TV shows

Day 3
- Read Childrens Book or show Movie clip to observe manners

Week 10 Accepting others ideas - 11/1/99

Day 1
- Accepting Others Ideas - Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Day 2
- Brainstorm everyday criticisms and how to turn them into positives

Day 3
- Traffic Jam

Week 11 Accepting others ideas - 11/8/99 (No school Thurs or Friday)

Day 1
- Create a cereal box(name, ingredients, picture, group values) Each members ideas must be represented

Day 2
- Finish box and present to class

Day 3
- Group feedback of boxes

Week 12 Closure - 11/15/99 (No school Monday/ end of trimester Friday)

Day 1
- Read Verdi

Day 2
- Trust activity - Blind Grand Prix

Day 3
- Survey

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, behavior checklists by the researchers will be analyzed and compared for any noticeable improvement. The students' September and November surveys will be compared, as will the surveys sent to parents in the same two months. M-charts will be used to assess the students' knowledge of social skill themes. M-charts are logs which require the students to list how the skill looks, sounds and feels. Students can give specific examples, feeling words or abstract ideas. Researchers will compare results of exercises and activities for common themes and signs of growth.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve academic and social growth by the teaching of social skills. Cooperative grouping, role play, direct instruction, journaling, discussion and modeling were selected as interventions to effect the desired changes.

Cooperative learning was used to teach social skills and was also employed as an instructional technique in delivering subject matter content. The social skills were taught directly while the students were in their classroom settings. The action plan was implemented during the second week of school and was maintained through the middle of November. Original plans called for three, one-half hour sessions per week, during which specific social skills were to be presented by the teacher and practiced by the students. Some of the researchers found it was more advantageous to follow the plan twice a week because of curricular constraints. Some weeks into the intervention, the number of sessions was decreased to two in some of the researcher's classrooms. The skills chosen for class work included: listening, encouraging others, accepting others' ideas appropriate manners, and self-control. These lessons were employed two and three times per week in either language arts, mathematics, reading or physical education.

The researcher teaching language arts targeted a seventh grade classroom of

twenty students. This class consisted of both regular education and resource students, with the students identified as gifted being pulled out into another program. The action plan lessons were taught in this class in conjunction with a year long theme of respect. This theme was being addressed through literature, writing and discussions. The focus on social skills was a natural tie-in to this focus. This researcher used a thematic approach to incorporate the targeted social skills into the language arts curriculum. Each social skill was handled as a separate theme, reviewing with the students at the end of each week's lessons what was learned and what social skill was addressed.

This researcher found the majority of students to be positive and open to the activities and discussions. The only resistance observed was in those students who overlapped with the students in the physical education targeted class. These students did not buy into the idea of participating in the activity twice, and often were verbal in their unhappiness about this. Other than these few dissenters, the students in the language arts classroom were engaged in class discussions and activities. This researcher observed that the social skills addressed in weeks one through seven were more favorably received than those addressed in weeks eight through twelve. Student comments about this were that they were tired of the M-charts and were beginning to want to move on in the curriculum. They continued, however, to be cooperative until the end of the action plan.

Seventh grade students in the language arts classes were especially responsive to active and hands-on activities. They enjoyed designing t-shirts that represented their own personalities and interests. They were eager to share these with their classmates, and when given the opportunity to write positive statements about each other on the shirts, were positive and careful about the words they chose. Per student reporting, the favorite social skill activity was "The Gossip Game".

The "Gossip Game" was an activity chosen to reinforce listening skills. In an

attempt to combine language arts curriculum with the research goals, the first focus in this activity was in creating a story. Three students left the room, and the remainder of the class collaborated on a short story. Knowing that another student would need to remember this story, the students tried to make the story unusual, and full of detail. When the story was written, one student was brought into the classroom. The story was read to this student by the teacher, and the student was reminded that they would be required to retell the story to the next student. The next student was brought in the room and retold the story by the student who just heard the story, and then this second student told it to the third student to reenter the room. Finally, the third student told the class the story as she or he heard and remembered it, and then the original story was reread. Following this activity, class discussion focused on listening skills and on how easily facts are altered when a message is retold. Students talked openly about gossip among their peers and the ways they have been hurt and have hurt others by inaccurate reporting of gossip and rumors. Students were clearly engaged and focused throughout the entire activity and the discussion.

Some changes have been observable as a result of the action plan. Class discussion is much improved, with students more engaged and responsive in classroom interactions. Class members often remind each other of the skills that were focused on, such as listening and respecting each others' ideas. Some of the growth in use of manners, listening, and self control can be attributed to the natural maturing process that occurs in a young adolescent. Students do, however, refer to the activities and discussions that occurred in the class, and relate these to books being read and current lessons being taught.

The researcher teaching mathematics targeted an eighth grade classroom of twenty-four students. The class was a pre-algebra class which contained both regular education and resource students. The action plan was to be taught in

twenty minute sessions, three times a week using structured activities to enhance social skills. The social skills the researcher focused on were listening skills, encouraging others, self control, appropriate manners, and accepting others ideas.

The researcher found it difficult to follow the action plan fully because of constraints placed on him by the curriculum. The parts of the action plan that the researcher did accomplish were well received by the students. The T-shirt activity went extremely well with the students and was reported to be their favorite. The students enjoyed writing positive comments about other students in the class. The students expressed being proud of what others said about them and felt good that they could encourage others. The researcher also noticed that when the students took the time to think about a certain social skill, like self control, they were able to articulate the importance of the skill. This was evident in discussions on all five social skills.

Positive changes were noticed as a result of the action plan. The class in which the researcher chose to implement the plan appeared more comfortable with each other than students in the other classes taught by the researcher. These students' grades were slightly higher than those in other comparable math classes. The general atmosphere of the class was more open and comfortable than it was before the action research. This researcher was disappointed that curriculum requirements did not allow time for the research plan to be more closely followed, as it was obvious that teaching these social skills had a positive impact on the students.

The researcher teaching reading targeted a sixth grade classroom of nineteen students. The class consisted of regular education students of varying levels of reading abilities. The action plan lessons taught in this class tied in with the two initial themes of the reading curriculum: self esteem and friendship. These two themes were being addressed through reading, journal writing and discussion. The instruction of social skills flowed well with the themes in the first two novels covered in the sixth

grade classroom. This researcher found students eager to accept the activities and able to make connections between the themes taught in the action plan and the literature.

This researcher followed the action plan fully through week five. Some curricular material, unrelated to the themes of the action plan, was not being taught in a timely fashion. It was deemed necessary to cut back on some research activities in order to meet curricular demands. The action plan was also modified to include more discussion reviewing the social skills covered. These discussions were ongoing throughout the intervention after week five.

Team Building was commenced during week one of the intervention, and was an important aspect in the overall acceptance of the program by the students. The hands on activities and games were perfectly suited to getting the students involved immediately, and comfortable with getting to know one another. The t-shirt activity was popular, and resulted in sincere appreciation of the students for one another. Careful thought went into the statements written on other students' shirts. Shirts were on display in the classroom for an extended time, and parental reports indicate that the shirts are treasured at home.

Each social skill considered during the intervention was introduced with an "M-Chart" that listed the three categories "Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like." Students brainstormed on their own in each instance, then with seating partners. Although this was viewed as repetitive, the students responded well to the familiar method, and the charts generated more ideas as the intervention continued.

A favorite activity in teaching listening skills was the "back to back" activity. Students were seated back to back as pairs. One partner described a picture of an object while the other partner drew the object from the description. During the first trial, no questions were allowed by the artist. During the second trial, the jobs were

reversed, and the artist was allowed to ask clarifying questions. Discussion followed which allowed students to share what was learned about giving clear messages, listening carefully and the benefit of being able to listen actively by asking questions.

The Gossip Game, described earlier, was another favorite of the reading class. As was discovered by the earlier researcher, this game was found to be a good generator of honest discussion. Another discussion activator was the student log of self control. Students shared their logs, in small groups, about times when they had maintained or lost self control over the set period. Helpful, empathetic comments from classmates made this a meaningful activity for many of the students.

The activities chosen for this intervention were accepted freely and were carried out willingly by the students throughout the intervention. The researcher heard no negative comments when a new skill or activity was introduced; discussions flowed freely in whole class and small group settings. Responses were sincere and thoughtful. Even with the shortened activity list, each social skill was introduced, modeled, practiced and discussed. It was helpful to the researcher to be able to tie these skilsl to the literature being taught.

The researcher teaching physical education targeted a seventh grade class consisting of 31 students. The students in this class were regular education students, special education students, and students in the gifted program. There were 18 girls and 13 boys in this class.

In the physical education classroom, the students were put into small working groups during the first week of the intervention. Social skills were taught in a large group format and then the students broke out and practiced new skills in their small groups. Social skills were taught using a variety of approaches, including cooperative learning and direct instruction. Each social skill was focused on as a separate unit. The researcher teaching physical education found the students fairly unwilling to

participate in the activities at the start of the intervention. The students expressed a desire to be moving and active in gym class, not sitting and writing. Because of scheduling, several students were also exposed to the same activities in their language arts class. This resulted in some students making negative comments, which often served to pull other students off task. These students did not exhibit the excitement for the games and activities that other students did. At times, there was also a lack of excitement due to the fact that the students were in a gym class and were missing out on activities their peers in other physical education classes were experiencing and were being required to do written work. Once the students were past the paperwork and into the activities, most students were more accepting of the topics being presented.

A few changes were made during the research. The researcher spent two days a week focusing on the action plan, starting in the third week. More ground was covered on those days, however the students seemed to be more willing to work when they only had to participate twice a week. Changes in social behavior has been noticed since the research began. The students' behavior and social skills seemed to improve when being observed by the researcher. Verbal encouragement was the skill most improved in the class. Students were noted to use fewer negative verbal comments during classroom activities, and encouraging words were more frequently used in the class setting. When working in large groups or teams, class members were more likely to say something positive to other team members than they were before the research began.

All four researchers met on a weekly basis during the action plan. At these times, progress was discussed and modifications suggested based on individual needs. Researchers brainstormed the most effective ways to approach activities and reflected on experiences in each class. The researchers found it extremely beneficial

to be working at one site. This facilitated the sharing of ideas and materials when it was necessary. On the other hand, the researchers teaching language arts and physical education found the crossover of students involved in the research to be a detriment to the success of the action plan.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of teaching social skills in the middle school classroom, parent surveys, student surveys and behavioral checklists were utilized. Results from the second parental survey indicate that parents noted improvement in the five social skills in question. A ranking of five demonstrated strength in the skill while a one indicated an area of weakness. In both surveys the average skill ranking of all five skill showed no real weakness in a given area. The ranked order of the skills in the earlier survey remained the same in the second survey with appropriate manners considered the students' strongest social skill and self control the weakest, according to the parents. Listening skills showed the strongest improvement. Appropriate manners, the strongest social skill demonstrated by the students in question, showed the least amount of improvement after the intervention. An improvement in the area of self control was shown, however it is still viewed by parents as the weakest area in their students' social skill development.

This data is represented in Figure 2 as a pre-intervention parent survey, and in Figure 3 as a post-intervention parent survey.

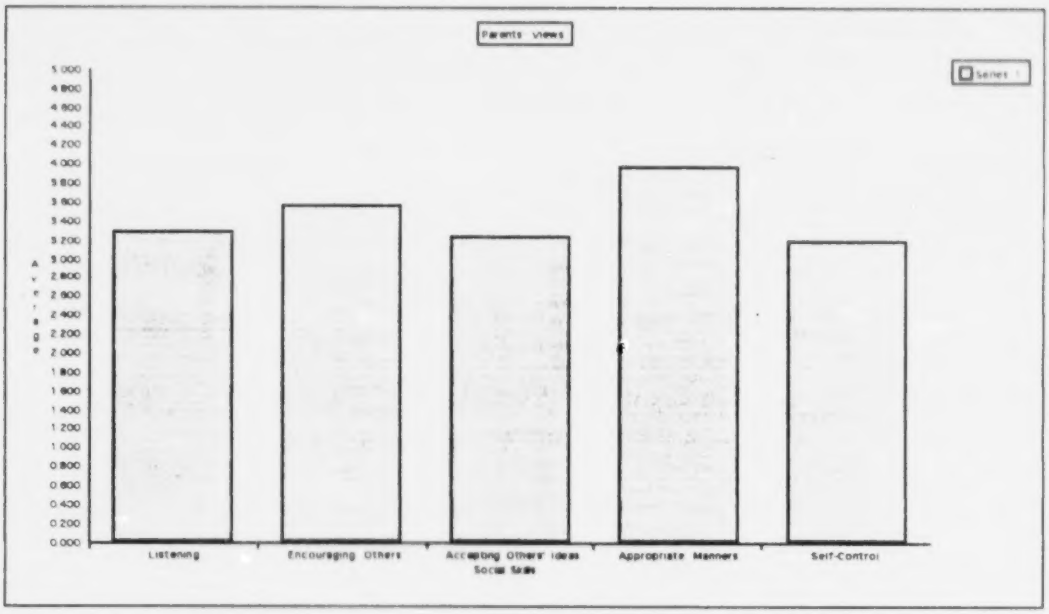

Figure 2. Social skills ranking of students as pre-parent surveys for the targeted classes during the fall of the 1999-2000 school year.

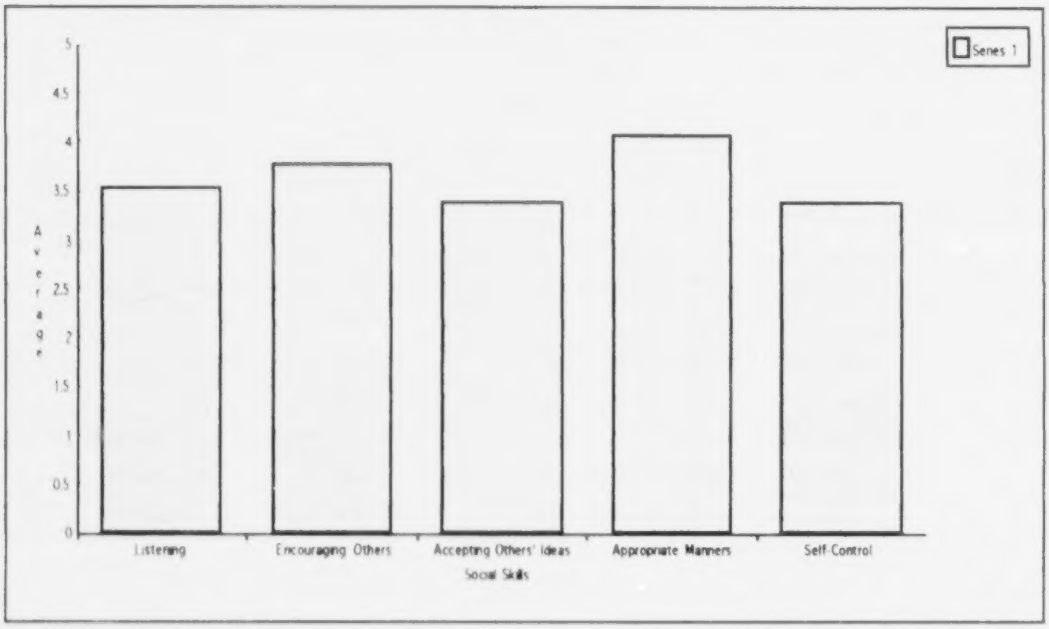

Figure 3. Social skills ranking of students as post-parent survey for the targeted classes in December, 1999, following the social skills interventions.

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The second post intervention tool used was the student survey. Per the targeted students' own reporting, feeling listened to by their peers was the area of most significant growth, while the exhibiting self -control remained virtually the same from their perspective. As in the first survey, students did not see self-control as an area that they lacked in, and viewed accepting other people's ideas even when different from their own as a very strong skill.

The final tool used was a behavioral checklist. Contrary to the first checklist, more positive than negative interactions were observed at the end of the intervention. The encouragement of others was observed, on the average, eight times per research classroom in the observed week. This was a significant improvement from the pre-intervention observation. Instances of criticizing other peers were diminished, and swearing in class was nonexistent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Each of the four researchers noticed differences in the behaviors of students in their classes after the intervention. In subsequent group work with the students, the atmosphere of the classes has been cooperative and constructive. Groups accomplished tasks willingly and in positive manners. Negative comments are not heard as frequently, and disruptive behaviors are not as common as they were prior to implementation of the action plan.

It is difficult to isolate any one aspect of the intervention as responsible for the improvement of the classroom climates. There are a variety of possible reasons for the changes noted by researchers in the behavior checklists, and in general classroom observations since the commencement of the interventions. These reasons would have to include the intervention itself, which made the goal of the implementation of social skills a valued part of the class curriculum. The skills taught and emphasized helped the students to understand and successfully carry out teacher expectations.

and focused the teacher's attention on these goals as well. Another possible reason for the noted improvements in social skills is the maturation process which naturally occurs in students throughout their middle school years.

Because of the chosen topics and activities, students are much better known by the teacher than at the start of the intervention. Current groupings of students in the various classes has been influenced greatly by the teachers' increased knowledge of the students' strengths and weaknesses, based on social skill discussions. Tasks assigned to students and groups are more commensurate with their abilities than those given earlier in, or before, the intervention. The researchers have acquired deeper understandings of the benefits and limitations of cooperative learning.

In new tasks assigned by the researchers, it has been observed that there is a greater willingness on the part of the students to take risks in front of their classmates. An atmosphere of trust is notably more pervasive in the classrooms than at the beginning of the intervention. This, too, can be attributed to the intervention, as more time than usual was spent in intentionally establishing levels of trust between students. A climate of cooperation, trust and comfort was established in an intentional manner. The time spent by all four of the researchers was deemed worthwhile, as it allowed for focused attention on aspects of classroom climate which encouraged greater participation of all students in risk taking, which is essential for student growth and learning.

In future teaching situations, many strategies and activities used during the action plan will be implemented by the researchers. All saw the benefit of concentrating on social skills with young adolescents, at a time in their lives when social concerns are paramount. While it was difficult to alter the curriculum to accommodate the action plan, each researcher found the middle school students to be responsive and eager to improve on these skills.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Parent Permission Form

September, 1999

Dear Parents,

I am currently pursuing my master's degree from St. Xavier University. As part of the requirement of the program, I am to complete an action research project. The issue I am researching is the level of social skills in middle schoolers. I will be collecting data beginning in September and ending in December. The data will be collected in a confidential manner in both formal and informal classroom activities. Some of the activities will include my observations, surveys, and lessons designed to improve and teach social skills. These activities will not decrease the amount of time spent on academic subjects, but will be used in conjunction with the curriculum.

All students will participate in classroom lessons pertaining to social skills. However, if you do not want your child to be a part of the data collected, you may refuse without penalty to your child.

Please sign and return the consent form to me by Friday, September 3 . If you are willing to allow your child to participate in the data collection, please complete the brief survey attached regarding your middle schooler's social skills as you observe them at home. Please send this survey back by Friday, September 3 , as well.

I want to thank you for your participation with my research project. I feel that my research will improve the social skills of the students in the class. Social skills are vital to learning at school, successful peer relationships, and positive interactions with adults.

If you have any questions regarding my research or the survey, please call me at Emerson at 318-8110.

Sincerely,

_____

Student Name_____

_____Yes, my child has permission to participate in the data collection of the research project.

_____No, please withhold my child from the data collection portion of the research project.

Parent Signature_____

Appendix B
Parent Survey

August 20, 1999

Dear Parents,

This trimester, as part of a Masters Program, I will be focusing on social skills of the students within our class. Your observations and opinions are valuable. Please answer as completely as possible. Know that your survey will be kept confidential. Do not include your name on this survey.

Rank the following social skills from 1 to 5, with 1 being your child's strongest social skill and 5 being the skill which needs the most improvement:

Encouraging _____
Listening _____
Accepting others' ideas _____
Appropriate manners _____
Self-control _____

What social skills do you feel your child needs to improve on? Give examples of where you see this weakness exhibited?

In the area of social skills, where do you see your child's strengths? Give specific examples of where you see these strengths exhibited?

Rate your child in the following areas, with 1 being weak and 5 being strong:

Listening Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Encouraging Others	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting Others' Ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate Manners	1	2	3	4	5
Self-Control	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for your input and cooperation.

Appendix C
Student Survey

Student Survey

Rank the following items from 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always.

1. I enjoy being encouraged by others. 1 2 3 4 5

2. When I am working in a group, my peers encourage me. 1 2 3 4 5

3. When I am in class, my teachers encourage me. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I feel listened to by my peers. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel listened to by my teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I accept other people's ideas, even when they are different from mine. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I use appropriate manners with my peers. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I use appropriate manners with my teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

9. It is difficult for me to exhibit self-control. 1 2 3 4 5

Please answer these questions as completely as possible.

10. What do you consider appropriate classroom behavior?

11. What behaviors have you seen from other students that bother or distract you?

12. If you could change one thing about your own behavior in school, what would it be?

45

Appendix D
Behavioral Checklist

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Encourages others					
Criticizes others					
Interacts with peers positively					
Interacts with peers negatively					
Swears					

Good Listening

Looks Like	Sounds Like	Feels Like

Appendix E
M-Chart

Appendix F
T-Shirt Lesson Plan

Purpose:
The students will be able to learn about themselves as well as others in their class before forming cooperative groups.

Materials Needed:
chart paper
markers/colored pencils
post-it notes

Time Needed:
One forty minute class period

Activity:

1. Have the students draw the outline of a t-shirt on the paper, as large as the paper.

2. Ask the students to graffiti their name large in the center of the t-shirt.

3. Under their name, have the students write one word that they feel best describes who they are.

4. Direct students to draw their favorite sport on the left sleeve.

5. On the right sleeve, have the students draw something that shows how they like to spend their free time.

6. In the bottom right corner of the shirt, students are to draw their favorite scene or character from a book.

7. In the bottom left corner of the shirt, students are to draw a goal that they have for themselves for the school year.

8. Allow any student who wishes to do so share their shirt with the class.

9. Have the students walk around the class and write positive comments about their classmates on post-its and stick them to the t-shirts.